

The Other Side

Full Script, First Draft
#1 of a Five Issue Series
For Will Dennis
Vertigo Comics

**“If You’re Lucky,
You’ll Only Get Killed”**

Written by
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Dedicated to the 1stMarDiv ISO Snuffies, 1967-1968

NOTE TO LETTERER - Because this story has two different narrators, it requires two sets of captions which are easily discernable from one another. The first represents the narration of an American Marine (I'll refer to this as CAPTION A), and the second is the narration of an NVA soldier (CAPTION B).

Page One

Splash Page

Close-up of Private Jon J. Falkner, a young Marine, screaming. He's been thrown to the ground by an exploding 82mm mortar round and sprayed with searing hot shrapnel. His legs are gone, his entrails are spilling out and his bowels are perforated. But we only see his face. His eyes are wide with shock, his face is freckled with splatters of gore, his mouth is open so wide it's almost inhuman, and he's screaming the most bloodcurdling howl you can imagine. His eyes see beyond. Beyond the shock of his injuries. Beyond his inevitable death.

Because this whole story is basically a symbolic hell descent (both main characters undertake the type of archetypal heroic quest exemplified by stories like *Beowulf*, *Heart of Darkness*, and *Apocalypse Now*), Private Falkner is not simply wounded: he's one of the damned being dragged into hell. In these last few unbearably painful moments, he's getting just a taste of the torture and horror that await him in the afterlife. And all for what?

For inspiration, look to Luca Signorelli's painting *The Last Judgement*, Jusepe Ribera's painting *The Flaying of Marsyas*, Russ Heath's story "O.P.!" in *Frontline Combat* #1, and the scene in *Full Metal Jacket* when Doc Jay is pinned down by the sniper, shot twice, and screaming wretchedly (don't worry, I can provide plenty of reference images). Across Private Falkner's helmet is written "Death be not proud," but the words wrap around the side so that we can't quite make out the entire phrase.

- 1 CAPTION A:** On Monday, **September 4, 1967**, CBS aired the final episode of "Gilligan's Island"...
- 2 CAPTION A:** Jimi Hendrix opened his show in Stockholm, Sweden with "Killing Floor"...
- 3 CAPTION A:** the Braves beat the Phillies in both games of a double-header at Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium...
- 4 CAPTION A:** and in the Quang Tin province of **South Vietnam**, 19-year-old Marine Private Jon J. Falkner earned his one and only **Purple Heart**...
- 5 CAPTION A:** when an 82mm mortar round blew off his legs and ripped open his bowels.
- 6 CAPTION A:** The poor bastard probably dreamed of marrying his high school sweetheart and opening the first drive-through burger joint in Bumfuck, Missouri...
- 7 CAPTION A:** but instead he died **facedown** in his own shit and the mud of the Que Son Valley.

Page Two

Four wide panels

1) Private Falkner being zipped up in a body bag. He's filthy with blood and mud and shit. A vestige of the look from Page One is frozen on his face. Operation Swift, which began on September 4, 1967, was one of the bloodiest operations of the year. Four companies of Marines would have been wiped out by the NVA were it not for the timely intervention of U.S. airpower. When the bombs actually began falling, the order had already been given to fix bayonets and the grunts on the ground were standing by for hand to hand combat. Those who'd run out of ammo had degenerated to rock-throwing. Two of the soldiers killed that day received the Congressional Medal of Honor, including a chaplain, who continued ministering to the dying, despite his wounds.

1 CAPTION A: Ambushed by a vastly superior NVA force, the Marines of **Operation Swift** were nearly overrun that day.

2) Two Marines, with rifles slung, have lifted Falkner's body bag from a pile of body bags and are carrying it toward a waiting chopper. Heavy rain is falling. The grunts are exhausted and numb from the fighting of the last few days.

2 CAPTION A: Still, the **grunts** of Mike Company 3/5 managed to gather up Private Falkner's remains and ship them back to **The World...**

3 GRUNT #1: **The Lord** giveth and the smoothbore, drop-fired **Eighty-Deuce** taketh away.

4 GRUNT #2: **There it is.**

3) Private Falkner's graveside funeral. A few family members are present, sobbing. The priest reads from his Bible. The casket is draped with an American flag.

5 CAPTION A: where in his hometown of Ypsilanti, Michigan, 30 miles outside of Detroit...

6 CAPTION A: a **million** miles away from the 'Nam...

7 CAPTION A: the lucky shitbird was laid to rest.

4) Nineteen-year-old Alabama farmboy Bill Everette gets his draft letter. We're looking at his hand, squeezing the letter. The knuckles are bruised and bloody. Beyond the hand, we see the mailbox, dented on the side where he punched it. The mailbox is labeled "Everette."

8 CAPTION A: The next day, I got a letter from **My Uncle**.

9 CAPTION A: Seems LBJ was hopin' I could **pick up** where the late Private Falkner had **left off**.

10 CAPTION A: Welcome to the world of zero slack, **Bill Everette**, you sorry sacka shit.

11 EVERETTE: Fuck me.

Page Three

Five panels

1) Establishing shot of the Everette family house in rural Alabama. It's a small farmhouse with a rusty tin roof. Weed-grown fields stretch into the distance. Pick-up truck sits in the driveway. In the side yard a junk car sits up on cinder blocks, half-covered with kudzu. Laundry hangs on the clothesline. The whole Everette family (mom, dad, Bill and Bill's little brother) are standing on the front porch, as

Bill leaves home for boot camp. A mangy looking dog wallows in the dirt.

1 CAPTION A: **Russellville, Alabama** is a piss-ant town no bigger than gnat shit.

2 CAPTION A: We got four or five **bonafide** sluts in town, and when I got my notice I screwed every one of 'em, just **prayin'** I'd get VD or some shit.

2) Close-up of Bill Everette's mom, crying her eyes out.

3 CAPTION A: Then the night before my physical, I got stinkin' ass drunk and puked on myself.

4 CAPTION A: I even told their doctor I was **queer** as all get-out and was gonna **fuck** every boy's ass I could get my hands on.

5 MOM: Oh Jesus, help me! **Not** my Billy! **Jesus**, don't take my Billy!

3) Close-up of Bill's dad, dry-eyed and serious.

6 CAPTION A: But they still took me.

7 DAD: Keep **The Lord** first, boy. He'll help ya kill those **Commie bastards** an' make us all proud.

4) Close-up of Bill's little brother, looking up fearfully, not quite understanding.

8 CAPTION A: My little brother asked where I was going.

9 CAPTION A: "Probably **Vietnam**," I said.

10 LIL' BROTHER: **Bye**, Bill.

5) Bill Everette stands on the front steps with a duffel bag in one hand and his draft notice in the other. He's a lanky teenage farmboy with a mass of curly brown hair.

11 CAPTION A: "Where's that?" he wanted to know.

12 EVERETTE (quietly): I got **no fucking idea**, bud.

Page Four

Four wide panels (same layout as Page Two)

1) A mangrove swamp in South Vietnam. Dead Viet Cong have been buried in shallow graves. A withered hand pokes up in one spot. A bloated, upturned face and open mouth in another spot. The mouth is filled with flies.

1 CAPTION B: My country is a **graveyard**.

2 CAPTION B: In the mangrove swamps of the **Mekong Delta**, where the graves are shallow and unmarked...

2) Deep in the jungle, along the Ho Chi Minh trail, a squad of NVA have been caught in a blast of napalm and burned to a crisp. We're at ground level, looking into the charred face of a dead soldier. He's lying on his side, staring straight at us with empty eye sockets. His lips are burned away, so he grins a morbid grin. Beyond him, the trees are black and smoldering, and the other NVA are all scattered, frozen in various poses of fright and surprise, their bodies covered with a viscous black magma resembling tar. Partially cloaked in shadow, a tiger drags away one of the corpses.

3 CAPTION B: In the jungle along the **Strategic Trail**, where the fighter planes drop barrels of fire...

3) A village has been bombed. Smoking craters dot the ground. Thatched huts are in flames. Dead villagers lie half-submerged in the water of the rice paddies. A naked child stands on the paddy dyke, wailing.

4 CAPTION B: In the torture chambers of the Saigon gangsters, in the tangled wire encircling our enemy's bases, in the filthy streets of the occupied hamlets...

5 CAPTION B: And even in our own rice paddies...

6 CAPTION B: My brothers and sisters lie **dead**.

4) Vo Dai, a 19-year-old Vietnamese farmboy, is praying at the altar of his ancestors. We see his hands holding a cluster of long incense sticks, trailing smoke. The altar sits on the dirt floor of the Vo family's bamboo hooch. The earthen floor is as hard and smooth as concrete. Inside a small, wooden cabinet sits an image of the Buddha surrounded by candles, flowers and old black and white photographs of Vo Dai's ancestors (a few of the photos show men and women brandishing guns).

7 CAPTION B: At the altar of my ancestors, I pray that my **own** death in the war for liberation might exemplify a soldier's dauntless heart...

8 CAPTION B: That I can **fight** until the last breath, then drop my wasted body on the battlefield like **trash**...

9 CAPTION B: And be at peace.

Five panels (same layout as Page Three)

1) The Nam Phong village, near Hanoi: a collection of rice paddies and thatch huts. In the center of the village sits a military transport truck with a red star on the door. The back of the truck is filled with young Vietnamese men carrying rifles and AK-47s. An NVA propaganda minister with a bullhorn stands nearby, speaking to the villagers working in the rice fields and emerging from the huts. An emaciated dog rolls in the dust.

1 CAPTION B: North Vietnam. The village of **Nam Phong**, near Hanoi. **My** village.

2 NVA RECRUITER: Vietnam is **one**! North and South are of the same family!

3A NVA RECRUITER: With our Southern compatriots fighting for their liberation against the **Saigon imperialists** and their **puppet army men...**

3B NVA RECRUITER: how can you **deny** your duty?

2) Close-up Vo Dai's mother, sad but proud. Her teeth are stained reddish-black from chewing betel nut.

4 CAPTION B: I tell my mother to think of me as **dead**, but to not be sad.

5A MOTHER: No mother ever wants to lose her son. But if you must die, die **gloriously**.

5B MOTHER: And I will see you again in the next life.

3) Close-up of Vo Dai's tiny father, standing with the aid of a cane, sternly handing over a gold pocket watch.

6 CAPTION B: My father gives me his most honored possession: the gold watch he took off

the body of a French soldier after the victory at **Dien Bien Phu**.

7 FATHER:

Do not **disgrace** us, Dai. Choke the villages of America with the blood of its sons. That is all I ask.

4) Close-up of the NVA propaganda minister, yelling fervently.

8 CAPTION B:

My name is **Vo Binh Dai**, son of farmers, son of soldiers.

9 CAPTION B:

Now I am ready.

10A NVA RECRUITER:

In the present state of blood and fire, the **People's Army of Vietnam** requires your commitment!

10B NVA RECRUITER:

Who here is willing to fight and die for the glory of the revolution?

5) Vo Dai presents himself to the NVA recruiter. He's dressed in simple black pajama-style clothes and rubber sandals, with a haversack thrown over his shoulder.

11 VO DAI:

I am.

Page Six

Five Panels

1) Establishing shot of the Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina. A cluster of red brick buildings and willow trees hung thick with Spanish moss. A Marine Corps bus is parked near one of the buildings. Backpacks and suitcases are scattered on

the concrete. The recruits have already arrived and been hurried inside, but we can still hear the shouts of the Drill Instructors.

- 1 CAPTION A:** The Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, South Carolina.
- 2 DI (tailless):** Alright you **maggots**, you're holding up the war! **Get the fuck off that bus!**
- 3 DI (tailless):** Assholes and elbows, you lazy herd!
Move it, move it, move it!

2) Inside one of the buildings, we see where the recruits were forced to strip. Their clothes are piled on the floor. A recruiting poster adorns the wall, showing a handsome Marine in dress blues, head uplifted, a shaft of sunlight brightening his face.

- 4 DI (tailless):** **Strip**, ladies! Take it **all** off! Skivvies, socks, rings, **everything!** I want you naked as the day your **sorry** ass was born!
- 5 DI (tailless):** Is this ugly sow your **girlfriend**, disphit?
No photos allowed! Get in line with the other maggots! Stand at attention **at all times!**

3) Further along are the barber chairs where the recruits were shaved. Curls and locks of hair are scattered all over the floor.

- 6 DI (tailless):** **Listen up**, needledicks! You have been issued a knapsack that includes all of your required gear!
- 7 DI (tailless):** If you have **not** received two pairs of socks, raise your hand!

4) In the empty shower room, wet towels are piled in a bin. Steam is still wafting through the room.

8 DI (tailless): If you're stupid enough to raise your hand when you **do** have two pairs of socks, you will **eat** the second pair! **Is that understood?!**

9 RECRUITS (tailless, large): Sir, yes, sir!

5) Everette stands at attention with a sock stuffed in his mouth. His head is freshly shaved. A Drill Instructor looms nearby, shouting.

10 DI: How's that **sock** taste, retard?

11 EVERETTE: Suh, guh, suh.

12 CAPTION A: I think I'm gonna **hate** this movie.

Page Seven

Five Panels

1) The senior Drill Instructor, Gunnery Sergeant Neet, is a gigantic, leather-faced man with a large mouth and a perpetually rotten disposition. He's a tough-as-nails lifer who chews bark for breakfast. We see him standing tall with his Smokey the Bear campaign cover perched atop his head, snarling his words. Behind him loom his two junior DIs, each with a malevolent glare that borders on the demonic. They're outside on the parade deck with the stars and stripes flapping in the background.

1 NEET: Listen up, you **maggots!**

2A NEET: You dipshits, shitbirds, fuckwads, fatbodies, faggots...

2B NEET: wetbacks, peckerwoods, porch monkeys, pantie sniffers, cry-baby pussies and candy-ass pogues!

2) Straight-on, waste-up shot of the recruits, white, black and Latino, with Everette in the middle. They're all standing at attention, bare-ass naked.

3 NEET (from-off): There are only **two ways** off my island! Either you **march** off, as a Marine, or you wash out and are **carried** off!

4 NEET (from-off): I am here to **motivate** you! To give you **esprit de corps**!

3) DI Neet strolls past the row of recruits, who stand at attention, their bare asses facing us.

5 NEET: You will not like having me in your face, but **tough shit!** The Commandant has declared that your sorry ass belongs to me for the next eight weeks!

6 NEET: Article 91 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice prohibits disobedience to a lawful order, so if I tell you to go **fuck** yourself, you commence to **fucking**!

4) Tighter on Neet, stomping by, barking out the side of his mouth.

7A NEET: **Forget** everything you already know! I will teach you how to stand, walk, run, and sleep!

7B NEET: I will teach you how to breathe, how to bleed, even how to **shit**!

5) DI Neet looms over one of the recruits, screaming in his face.

8 NEET: **You! Fuckface!** I can already tell I'm gonna have to **shit-can** your sorry ass! Ain't that right?

9 RECRUIT #1: **Sir, no sir!**

10 NEET: Oh, so you're **hot-shit!** You just came by to pick up a set of dress blues!

Page Eight

Nine Panels

1) The DI looms over the recruit, screaming in his face.

1 NEET: Do you **love** me, you maggot?

2 RECRUIT #1: Sir?

2) Close-up of the recruit, replying loudly, trying to suppress his terror.

3 NEET (from-off): You heard me! Do you love your drill instructor?!

4 RECRUIT #1: **Sir, yes, sir!**

5 NEET (from-off): You sure?

6 RECRUIT #1: **Sir, yes, sir!**

3) The DI slaps the recruit hard across the face.

7A NEET: Well, **lookie** here! You queer for my gear, sweetheart?

7B NEET: I'm not surprised, you fairy-faced fuckboy!

4) The DI looms over another recruit.

8 NEET: What about you, **maggot**? Do **you** love me?

5) Close-up of the recruit, who's louder and more confident than the previous one.

9 RECRUIT #2: **Sir, no, sir!**

10 NEET (from-off): Then you **hate** me, you'd like to **kill** me?!

11 RECRUIT #2: **Sir, no, sir!**

6) The DI punches the recruit in the stomach.

12 NEET: **Bullshit!** You're a dirty Communist ratfucking prick if I've ever seen one!

7) The DI looms over Everette.

13 CAPTION A: Oh, **great!**

14 NEET: And how about **you**, retard? Do you love me?

8) Close-up of Everette, terrified, with the sock still sticking out of his mouth.

15 NEET: Well? You gonna **answer** your drill instructor?

16 EVERETTE: Umm...

17 CAPTION A: What would **Audie Murphy** do?

9) The DI punches Everette in the face.

18 NEET: Gutless little turd! You make me wanna **vomit!**

Page Nine

Four Panels

1) Everette's on his knees, spitting up blood, with the DI standing nearby. The sock lies on the floor in front of him.

1 CAPTION A: Thus begins my **illustrious** battle to halt the menacing spread of Communism.

2A NEET: You are one **grade-A** lump of shit,
Private **Fucko!**

2B NEET: There's no way in **hell** I'm gonna let
your inbred, hillbilly **fuckheadedness**
ruin my beloved Corps!

3 NEET: Pick up your fucking breakfast!

2) We see Everette's hand reaching out to pick up the sock. But now, someone is standing over it, dressed in filthy combat boots and rotting pants.

4A NEET (from-off): You think this is **abuse**? You think this
is abuse, you cocksuckers?

4B NEET (from-off): If you can't take **this**, how the hell you
ladies gonna last in the **jungle**?

3) Everette looks up in shock.

5A NEET (from-off): The gook **lives** in the jungle! The gook's
born in the jungle!

5B NEET (from-off): And if you are not **squared away** and
born-again-hard...

4) We see that the filthy boots belong to No-Face, the gruesome ghost of a dead Marine. His clothes are all rotting, filthy and full of holes, some of them torn by shrapnel. Through the torn clothing, we can see

the raw red meat of his insides. But his skin is a ghostly pale. His face is a mess. His lower jaw is missing. His eyes are pleading, as he tries to speak. Everette looks on in horror.

6 NEET (from-off): the gook will **fuck** you up beyond
all recognition!

7 NO-FACE: Ah?

Page Ten

Five Panels

1) Dressed in their traditional khaki uniforms and pith helmets, Vo Dai and the NVA recruits are spread along a path through the jungle, all carrying rifles and huge packs on their backs. They've been marching for hours, and they're all drenched with sweat. The path cuts through the site of a former French rubber plantation, where the jungle has overgrown the ruined, crumbling buildings. A light mist swirls around the feet of the marching soldiers. Their instructor calls to them from off-panel. With a mixture of wonder and fear, Vo Dai looks around at the immense foliage. It's the rainy season in Vietnam, so the jungle is water-soaked. The ground is thick mud covered with a carpet of rotting leaves.

1 CAPTION B: I have never been deep in the jungle
before.

2 CAPTION B: I have never been more than thirty
kilometers from the village where I was
born.

3 CAPTION B: But I know a **ghost** when I see one.

4A INSTRUCTOR (from-off): With **vigor**, my comrades! March
with vigor! You would not want to miss
your chance at **glory!**

5B INSTRUCTOR(from-off): In the South, the war is almost
won!

2) The NVA instructor stands in front of a rusted old truck, its windows shattered and tires flat. He watches the recruits pass, each of them bent over and exhausted.

5 CAPTION B: This place is thick with hungry ghosts.

6 CAPTION B: The restless spirits of those who died violently and did not receive proper burial. Spirits that refuse to depart for the **Other World**.

7A INSTRUCTOR: If you doubt the inevitability of the revolution's success, **just look around you!**

7B INSTRUCTOR: Before the Americans, there were the **French**. But now these **ruins** are all that remain of them!

3) Gazing around, Vo Dai passes a crumbling building.

8 CAPTION B: I can feel the ghosts around me. I can hear their **sobbing whispers**.

9A INSTRUCTOR: **Comrade General Giap** and **Uncle Ho** lived in the mountains for twenty years with nothing to eat but snakes and roots...

9B INSTRUCTOR: yet they never doubted that they would be victorious against the French invaders!

4) Close-up of the NVA instructor.

- 10 CAPTION B:** All over Vietnam, **lost souls** are trying to find their way home.
- 11A INSTRUCTOR:** When all **thirty million** Vietnamese rise up as one, we have the strength to move mountains and drain up seas!
- 11B INSTRUCTOR:** Like the French and the Japanese before them, the **Americans** will soon be wiped out and buried!

5) We see the recruits down the path, disappearing into the jungle shadows.

- 12 CAPTION B:** Tonight I will begin leaving an offering among the trees.
- 13 INSTRUCTOR (from-off):** Where is your revolutionary **zeal**, my comrades? **Liberation** is at hand!

Page Eleven

Five Panels

1) In a clearing along the path, the NVA recruits have paused to eat lunch. They're sitting on the ground, eating gobs of rice with chopsticks. Vo Dai writes in a small journal, seemingly ignoring the two recruits sitting on a nearby tree trunk, having an intense discussion.

- 1 CAPTION B:** I have decided to keep a record of my journey, because I know that my family will cherish it, once I am **dead**.
- 2 RECRUIT #1:** I tell you, do not doubt that they are **animals!** Filthy, ignorant **animals!**

2) Closer on Vo Dai and the two chatting recruits.

3 CAPTION B: So far, I have been given many fine new possessions.

4 CAPTION B I have learned how to shoot in the dark and bayonet wicker men.

5 RECRUIT #1: My cousin defied the Americans at **Ia Drang**, and bore witness to their brutality.

6 RECRUIT #2: Yes, I've heard the stories.

3) Focus on those two recruits.

7 CAPTION B: I have listened to many inspiring stories about Uncle Ho and Comrade General Giap.

8 CAPTION B: And I have strengthened my legs for the long march South.

9A RECRUIT #1: They are **more** than just stories, comrade. Make no mistake, if we are captured, we will be **tortured**.

9B RECRUIT #1: Our intestines will be cut out and fed to the dogs. **That** is the way it is. They **delight** in our suffering.

4) Focus on Vo Dai, writing in his journal, holding the gold watch in his hand.

10 CAPTION B: My instructors are hard yet fair.

11 CAPTION B: Two days ago, I was strongly criticized because I lacked skill with the rifle.

12 RECRUIT #2 (from-off): Some say that the Long Noses are **cannibals**. That they mutilate our dead for food.

13 RECRUIT #1 (from-off): It is **true**!

5) Again, focus on Vo Dai writing in his journal. Perhaps go tighter on the gold watch in his hand.

14 CAPTION B: For the honor of my family, I must endeavor to improve my marksmanship.

15A RECRUIT #1 (from-off): The Americans fight for **money** and love of **slaughter**, nothing else. Even their **own** countrymen despise them!

15B RECRUIT #1 (from-off): They are **animals**, pure and simple!

16 RECRUIT #2 (from-off): It will be a good thing to finally **kill** one.

Page Twelve

Six Panels

1) These next two pages are a montage of Everette's training that highlight the process of his dehumanization and the progression of his visions. Everette's in the shower stall, on his knees, being choked by his drill instructor. No-Face leans over him. The DI is snarling, choking the life out of his recruit, but Everette's frightened eyes are riveted on the ghost. No-Face's own eyes show the same fear and wonder.

1 CAPTION A: Two weeks into my training, I am a **non-hacker** of the highest degree.

2 NEET: I **sure** hope this don't hurt your feelings, son, but I'm afraid I'm just the **tad** bit disappointed with your performance of late!

3A NEET: You must be spending your time **daydreaming** about the good old days back on the farm...

3B NEET: **Slopping** the hogs. **Lynching** the niggers. **Fucking** your sister.

4 NO-FACE: Ah?

2) Everette's eating lunch in the mess hall with the other recruits, though he doesn't have much of an appetite, since No-Face is standing behind him, leaning down, gesticulating, desperate to speak.

5 CAPTION A: But I'm not **crazy**.

6 NO-FACE: Aaaah?

3) Everette's lying in his bunk with his pillow over his face. Now there are two ghosts leaning over him. In addition to No-Face, there's an Unknown Soldier type, with his head all wrapped up in bloody bandages. Not mummy-style bandages, but more realistic: big, fat, bloody bandages held in place by medical tape.

7 CAPTION A: I **can't** be crazy.

8 NO-FACE: Ah, ah?

9 BANDAGES: Guuuhh.

4) The recruits are jogging down a road through the woods. Everette is exhausted. No-Face and Bandages are on either side of him. His arms are around their shoulders, and they're helping him walk. Down the path in front of Everette two recruits are chatting while they jog.

10 CAPTION A: If I were crazy, I'd **know** it. Wouldn't I?

11 RECRUIT #1: They're **animals**, that's what I heard.
Filthy fucking animals.

5) Everette and the other recruits sit on the lockers in front of their bunks, cleaning their rifle. Everette's looking down at his rifle. Nearby, the same two recruits from the previous panel are still chatting.

12 RECRUIT #2: Who? The VC?

13A RECRUIT #1: VC. NVA. Don't **matter**, man. They're all slant-eyed Commie bastards.

13B RECRUIT #1: My cousin Josh is a freakin' **Green Beret**, and he told me all kinds of crazy ass stories.

14 EVERETTE: At least it can't get **worse**.

6) Inset. Close-up of the rifle, looking down at it from Everette's perspective. The rifle speaks out of the end of its barrel.

15 RIFLE: I want to fuck your brains out.

Page Thirteen

Five Panels

1) Everette's at the shooting range, laying down, having just fired his weapon. The drill instructor kneels over him, screaming. On the other side of him kneels No-Face. Everette and the ghost are both distracted by the voice coming out of the rifle barrel.

1 CAPTION A: I'm **crazy**. Just a coupla weeks, and I'm already crazy. **Dad's** gonna kill me.

2 RIFLE: You can't shoot for shit, asshole. Let **me** aim next time.

3 NEET: **Congratulations**, you slimy little limp dick! You have completely mastered the art of being **utterly** fucking useless!

2) Everette lies in bed, holding his rifle to his chest, shouting his prayers with the other recruits.

4 EVERETTE: **This is my rifle! There are many like it, but this one is mine!**

5 RIFLE: Put me in your mouth.

3) Everette stands tall before the DI during drills, rifle held in front of him. Everette's sweating and nervous.

6 EVERETTE: **Sir**, the private's Seventh General Order...

7 RIFLE: Is to fuck your mother.

8A EVERETTE: **Sir**, the private's Seventh General Order is to fu—

8B EVERETTE: **Sir**, the private has been instructed, but he does not remember, **sir!**

4) The recruits are in the head. One whole wall is a row of toilets with nothing separating them. The same two chatty recruits from the previous page sit next to each other, underwear around their ankles, talking like there were just sitting on the bus. Next to them, a recruit is reading a Sgt. Fury comic.

9 RECRUIT #1: The dinks **chain** their little monkey kids to machine guns, did you know that?

10 RECRUIT #2: No shit?

- 11 RECRUIT #1:** Every one of those slopehead brats is liable to be packing a **grenade**. That's why it's best to **shoot** first and **not** ask questions later, know what I mean?
- 12 RECRUIT #2:** I hear ya. They're fucking animals.

5) Inset. Moving down the line of toilets, we see Everette slumped forward on the toilet, elbows on his knees. His face, arms and legs are covered with bruises. He's at the end of his rope. He's about to snap: to scream or cry or shoot himself in the head.

- 13 RECRUIT #1:** They're goddamn **inhuman**.

Page Fourteen

Five Panels

1) Straight-on shot of Everette, sitting in the Chaplain's air-conditioned office.

- 1 CAPTION A:** In a fit of desperation, I visit the Chaplain's office.

- 2 CHAPLAIN:** Tell me, Private...are the ghosts here **now**?

2) The Chaplain sits at his desk, putting on his best attempt at a comforting, fatherly grin. Behind him stand five ghosts, including No-Face, Bandages, a grunt who's been burned to a crisp (and is still smoking), one who's been shot to shit, and a fifth in a gas mask.

- 3 NO-FACE:** Ah?
- 4 BURN VICTIM:** Hssss...
- 5 GAS-MASK:** Mmpphh!
- 6 EVERETTE (from-off):** Yes, sir.

3) The Chaplain and Everette sit across from one another.

7 CHAPLAIN: I see. And what do they **say**? Do they say anything?

8 EVERETTE: I don't know, sir. They...they **try** to speak, but I can't understand them.

4) Everette looks down at his rifle, which is leaned against the wall beside his chair.

9 CHAPLAIN (from-off): What about the **rifle**? Is it saying anything to you right now?

10 RIFLE: **Shoot** this prick! Stick me up his ass and pull the trigger!

11 EVERETTE: Um, **yes**, sir.

5) The Chaplain and Everette sit across from one another.

12 CHAPLAIN: Does it tell you to **hurt** yourself?

13 EVERETTE: Sometimes, sir.

Page Fifteen

Eight Panels

1) Inset. Close-up of Everette.

1 CHAPLAIN (from-off): And the **dream**? You were telling me about a dream?

2) Wide panel. Vo Dai in the jungle, carrying his rifle, but not lugging the huge pack. It's dark, and he's sneaked out from the training camp, back to the ruins of the French plantation. He looks up at the

sky, hearing strange voices on the wind. The darkness is alive with fireflies.

2 CAPTION A: I'm in the jungle.

3 VO DAI: Hello?

3) Vo Dai pulls a handful of food from his pocket. A couple of rice balls and some brightly wrapped candies.

4 EVERETTE (tailless): There are **shapes** in the darkness.
Watching me. Creeping forward.

4) Vo Dai places the offering on leaves in front of a small Buddha figurine.

5 EVERETTE (tailless): I hear them **calling**...

6 VO DAI: Brothers underground, I pray that this offering will **aid** you on your journey...

5) Dai kneels in prayer, hands clasped, rifle slung.

7 VO DAI: and that in return, you will aid me as I begin **mine**.

8A CHAPLAIN (tailless): Uh huh. Well, Private, as your **spiritual adviser**...

8B CHAPLAIN (tailless): I suggest you **stow** all this crackpot bullshit and get your ass squared away, most **ricky-tick**.

6) Ground level view of the offering Dai left. Looking out, as if from the perspective of the Buddha, we see Dai's back as he slips away into the jungle.

9 CHAPLAIN (tailless): Jesus don't abide a **crybaby**, son...

7) Same view as the previous panel. But Dai is gone.

10 CHAPLAIN (tailless): and neither does the Marine Corps.

8) Same view again. But now the pale, rotting hand of a ghost slips in to grab one of the rice balls.

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Page Sixteen

Seven Panels

1) Everette lies on his back in bed, bleary-eyed, clutching his rifle, mumbling his prayers. The DI has marched up, interrupting him, screaming (as usual).

1 EVERETTE: My rifle is...is...I must master...

2 NEET: **Everette**, you fuckwad! What the hell are you doing to my **beloved Corps**!

2) The DI stands surrounded by as many ghosts as you can fit in. They glare at him angrily.

3 NEET: You have to see the **light**, maggot! The white light, the great light, the guiding light! You have to get the vision! Understand?

4 EVERETTE (from-off): **Sir, yes, sir.**

3) Close-up of Everette, in a daze.

5 NEET (from-off): **What** do you understand?

6 EVERETTE: Sir?

7 NEET(from-off): You said you understood. I wanna know what you understand.

8 EVERETTE: Sir, you said I—

4) Everette clutches his rifle as the DI leans in, screaming even louder, pissed off beyond belief.

9A NEET: **YOU! YOU!** A **ewe** is a female sheep, and female sheep are for fucking!

9B NEET: **Why do you want to fuck your drill instructor?**

10 RIFLE: You wanna fuck his bloody skull!

5) Everette lunges off the bed, madness in his eyes, hands up like he wants to rip the drill instructor limb from limb.

11 EVERETTE: **I wanna fuck your bloody skull!**

6) Without even blinking, the DI punches him square in the jaw.

12 SFX: **WHAM!**

7) Everette's out cold on the floor, blood trickling down his chin. The DI stands over him, proud as hell, while the other recruits stare in amazement from their bunks.

13A NEET: **Out-fucking-standing!** It's about **time** you showed some guts, maggot!

13B NEET: We may make a **Marine** outta you, yet!

Page Seventeen

Five Panels

1) Inset. Close-up of Everette, still lying on the floor, unconscious, with blood trickling from the corner of his mouth.

1 CAPTION A: Unconscious on the cold floor, I **dream**.

2) Everette's dream. He's standing in the darkened jungle, frightened.

2 EVERETTE: Hello?

3) Shapes begin to emerge from the darkness before him. It's a huge mass of zombie grunts, including all the ghosts we've seen before, plus others. There are grunts who're missing limbs, grunts riddled with bullets, grunts with the wooden spikes of booby traps still sticking out of their chests, grunts pierced with smoldering shrapnel, pilots in cracked, blood-splattered helmets, medics, a suicide, even a priest. Just cram in as many as you can (although, in this panel, they're still mostly shrouded in darkness). In his short story "Chickamauga," Civil War-era author Ambrose Bierce described a similar view:

"They were men. They crept upon their hands and knees. They used their hands only, dragging their legs. They used their knees only, their arms hanging idle at their sides. They strove to rise to their feet, but fell prone in the attempt. They did nothing naturally, and nothing alike, save only to advance foot by foot in the same direction. Singly, in pairs and in little groups, they came on through the gloom, some halting now and again while others crept slowly past them, then resuming their movement. They came by dozens and by hundreds; as far on either hand as one could see in the deepening gloom they extended and the black wood behind them appeared to be inexhaustible. The very ground seemed in motion toward the creek. Occasionally one who had paused did not again go on, but lay motionless. He was dead. Some, pausing, made strange gestures with their hands, erected their arms and lowered them again clasped their heads; spread their palms upward, as men are sometimes seen to do in public prayer."

NOTE TO LETTERER - There are a few small balloons coming from the emerging crowd, but they're too far away for us to hear.

3 ZOMBIES: ...

4) Everette recoils in horror from the rotting, bloody hands that reach out for him. Some of them are bandaged. Some are missing fingers.

4 CAPTION A: My dream smells of **cordite** and **blood**.

5 EVERETTE: Oh, my God...

NOTE TO LETTERER - As the crowd gets closer, the balloons get bigger and more numerous. The dialogue includes as many of the following as possible:

6 ZOMBIES: Ambush! Take cover!
Fire in the hole!
Sappers in the wire!
It's goddman eat up with enemy down
there!

Incomin'! Hit the deck!
Fire for effect! Pour it on!
Mayday! Mayday! We're going down!
Beaucoup VC! They're all over us!
Check fire! Check your fire!
Get some!

5) Everette falls, and the dead grunts begin to pour over him.

7 EVERETTE: No...no, **stay back!**

NOTE TO LETTERER - Closer, louder, balloons overlapping:

8 ZOMBIES: AAARRRRGGHHH!!
I'm hit! Medic!
Help me...I'm hit...
Momma!

I don't wanna die...
I'm too short for this shit.
I'm taking fire, I'm taking hits all over!
My legs! God, my legs...
Corpsman! I'm dying!
Don't leave me here...please...
It hurts, momma...
I'm not supposed to be here.
I'm not supposed to die like this.

Page Eighteen

Four Panels

1) Everette lies on the ground, looking up at the wall of dead grunts, fully revealed. In their center is Private Falkner, from page one. His legs are blown off, and he's dragging himself along with his hands, crawling toward Everette. Also, as an homage to Don Lomax (writer and artist of the amazing *Vietnam Journal* series), I'd like to include Andrew Church, a gun-toting, bandoleer-wearing zombie grunt from Lomax's *Fire Team* mini-series.

NOTE TO LETTERER - The balloons are now a tangled, overlapping mass:

1 ZOMBIES:

My wife didn't want me to get any more
Purple Hearts.
I was young and the young love to travel.
I was fragged by my own troops.
My M-16 jammed.
I took my own life.
I had a baby I'd never seen.
Blood makes the grass grow.

Kill or be killed.
My government betrayed me.
I died for a nameless hill.
Except for gook whores, I was still a
virgin.

2) Big panel of Private Falkner as he looms over Everette. His face is rotting. His screaming shakes the maggots loose, and they fill the air around him. The maggots echo his cry.

2 FALKNER: **Why did I die?**

3 MAGGOTS (tiny-balloons): Why?

NOTE TO LETTERER - If possible, have at least six different maggots repeat the same word.

3) Close-up of Everette, scared out of his mind, maggots falling around him.

4 EVERETTE: I don't know.

5 MAGGOTS (just a few more): Why?

4) The wave of mangled bodies engulfs Everette, burying him.

NOTE TO LETTERER - This last mass of balloons is so crowded, we can only make out a word here and there:

6 ZOMBIES: KIA
ground casualty
head-shot
body count
cluster bomb
Momma!
chest wound
Semper Fi
shrapnel

search and destroy

betrayed

Panel 16E

dead

why

why

why

Page Nineteen

Four Panels

1) Inset. Vo Dai sleeping.

1 CAPTION B: My **last** night at the training camp, I **dream.**

2) Big panel. Vo Dai's dream. His comrades are scattered on the ground, slaughtered. Over them loom demonic Marines. They're Buddhist demons, adorned with tiny skulls, their heads engulfed in flames. They're gleefully mutilating the NVA soldiers, gathering ears and severed heads. Beyond them, the jungle is in flames.

2 CAPTION B: About the Americans.

3 CAPTION B: **The Black Rifles.**

3) The severed heads of Vo Dai's dead comrades, frozen with fear and pain.

4 CAPTION B: It is a warning from the spirits in the forest.

5 COMRADES: **Vo Dai**, where were you?

6 COMRADES: **Vo Dai**, you should have been here.

7 COMRADES: **Vo Dai**, you let us down.

4) Dai crawls, wounded, but determined, his guts spilling out, helplessly clawing the ground.

8 CAPTION B: I **must** not fail.

9 VO DAI: **No.** No...

Page Twenty

Five Panels

1) Their training completed, hundreds of NVA soldiers are loading onto a train. The propaganda minister from Page Five is there, urging on the troops.

1 CAPTION B: Our training completed, my comrades and I begin our long journey.

2 CAPTION B: The train will take us deeper into the jungle. And from there, we begin **the march.**

3 NVA RECRUITER: **Rejoice!** Rejoice, my comrades!

2) Mounting the steps into the train, Vo Dai pauses, looking back at a disturbance in the crowd.

4 CAPTION B: Many of us will never return.

5A NVA RECRUITER (from-off): Look around you! The assembled might of Vietnam **shakes** the very ground!

5B NVA RECRUITER (from-off): You are helping to write a golden page in the **glorious** history of our people!

3) The crowd parts as two soldiers make their way through, their heads bowed in shame. The crowd eyes them angrily, mumbling insults. One of these two cowards is Ngo Xuan, a young man who'll play a bigger role next issue. Like the rest of the young soldiers, Xuan is an average, undistinguished young man from the farming villages of the North.

6 CAPTION B: Reluctant to leave their homes, some of my comrades had attempted to return to their villages.

7 CAPTION B: Naturally, the women and the children there **laughed** at them.

8 SOLDIER #1 (mumbling): Dogs.

9 SOLDIER #2 (mumbling): Look at the land crabs.

10 SOLDIER #3 (mumbling): You stink like shrimp sauce, coward.

4) Focus on the NVA propaganda minister, excitedly urging on the troops.

11A NVA RECRUITER: The U.S. aggressors may **destroy** our crops, **raze** our villages and **enslave** our compatriots...

11B NVA RECRUITER: but they will **never** break our spirit!
Long live the Revolution!

5) Dai eyes Xuan as the young man squeezes past him on the stairs.

12 VO DAI: Come South and **die** with us, brother.

Page Twenty-One

Five Panels

1) Green Marines are boarding a chartered 707 at Seattle-Tacoma airport. A line of aging Korean and WWII veterans are there to see them off. One of the vets is in a wheelchair. Another has a hook for a hand. The vets are saluting. Nearby, three women, all dressed in black, are weeping, as if for the dead. On the other side of a chain-link fence, hippie protestors are burning the American flag, giving the finger to the troops and waving banners that read "Baby Killer!" and "Hell No We Won't Go!"

1 CAPTION A: Somehow or another, I actually graduate.

2 CAPTION A: As a reward, the Corps gives me a set of dress blues, a shot in the ass and a one-way plane ticket.

3 LOUD-MOUTH (tailless): Fasten your seat belts, Marines, and stand by for a major mind-fuck! Next stop, **Vietnam!**

2) Everette sits on the plane, looking out the window.

4 LOUD-MOUTH (from-off): You new guys may think you're just dropping by to **fuck** Charlie's daughters, **napalm** his mother and rid his village of Communism...

3) Everette's view from the window. Close-up of an aging vet, saluting with his hook-hand.

5 LOUD-MOUTH (from-off): but be advised...this is **Mother Carbine's** world and you're just **target practice** for her many children!

6 GRUNT #1 (from-off): Sit down!

4) Everette looks toward the center aisle of the plane, where a large grunt is stomping by, with a shit-eating grin. Some of the other Marines are laughing. A couple are obviously annoyed.

7A LOUD-MOUTH: Looking around, I see many future recipients of the **Dumb Fucker's Medal!** I see **sucking chest wounds** just waiting to happen!

7B LOUD-MOUTH: **The Crotch** is the greatest machine ever designed for the murder of young men, and you are soon to be **nonviewable** proof!

8 GRUNT #2: There it is!

5) Everette turns back to the window, trying not to listen to the loud-mouth grunt.

9 LOUD-MOUTH (from-off): If you're lucky, you'll only get killed.

Page Twenty-Two

Six Panels

1) Everette looks out the window, eyes wide, seeing Vietnam for the first time.

1 CAPTION A: Thirty-six hours later, I get a first glimpse of my new home.

2) Vo Dai looks out the window of the train.

2 CAPTION B: Passing through the countryside, I get a glimpse of what I am fighting for.

3) Everette's aerial view of the 'Nam. A beautiful beach and a gorgeous green landscape.

3 CAPTION A: **Vietnam.**

4) Vo Dai's view of the 'Nam. Tired, hard-working villagers pause in the rice fields to wave excitedly at the passing train. A young boy stands on the back of a water buffalo, hopping, waving and grinning.

4 CAPTION B: It is **beautiful**.

5) Gazing out the plane's window, Everette silently prays, trying to suppress his fear.

5 CAPTION A: Dear Jesus...

6 CAPTION A: **Please** don't let me die here.

6) Gazing out the train's window, Vo Dai prays, his face a Buddha-like mask of bliss.

7 CAPTION B: I dedicate myself to Buddha, to the doctrine, to the society.

8 CAPTION B: I **beg** you...do not let my sacrifice be in vain.